25. (Twice amended) [The apparatus described in claim 24] Apparatus for automatically verifying whether a new rule which is to be added to a set of rules to control a personal software agent is valid with respect to the set of rules, each rule specifying a set of conditions and a sequence of actions being interpreted in a system which causes the actions specified in the rule to be performed when the conditions specified in the rule are satisfied, the apparatus comprising:

a stored subsumption hierarchy of the rules in the set of rules;

means for placing the new rule to control the personal software agent in the subsumption hierarchy; and

means for using the subsumption hierarchy which includes the new rule to determine whether the new rule conflicts with another rule in the hierarchy and provide an indication when a conflict exists,

wherein the means for using the subsumption hierarchy further uses the subsumption hierarchy to determine a suggested correction for the new rule when the new rule conflicts with another rule and provide the suggested correction.

REMARKS

Introduction

Claim 25 has been amended and claims 1-31 remain pending in this application.

Claims 25 and 26 were objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim. Claim 25 has been rewritten as suggested by the Examiner to include the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claim. Claim 26 depends from the now allowable claim 25. Thus, claims 1-23 and 25-31 are allowable as indicated in the Office Action.

Claim 24 stands rejected in view of certain prior art. In particular, it is asserted that claim 24 is anticipated under 35 U.S.C. § 102 by T.A. Nguyen, W.A. Perkins, T.J. Laffey and D. Pecord, "Checking an Expert Systems Knowledge Base for Consistency and Completeness," Proceedings of the Ninth Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence, August 1985 (the "Nguyen